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(54) Title: METHOD FOR MAKING AN ALLOY COATED BATTERY GRID

(57) Abstract: A method of forming battery grids or plates that includes the step of applying a lead alloy coating to a continuous strip of interconnected battery grids formed from a lead alloy grid material is disclosed. The battery grids may be formed by a continuous battery grid making process such as strip expansion, strip punching, or continuous grid casting. In one version of the method, the grid wires of a continuous strip of battery grids produced by a punching process are immersed in a melt of the lead alloy coating. In another version of the method, the grid wires of a continuous strip of battery grids produced by a punching process are deformed such that the grid wires have a cross-section other than the rectangular cross-section produced by the punching process and the strip of interconnected grids is immersed in a melt of the lead alloy coating. The method increases the cycle life of a battery.

METHOD FOR MAKING AN ALLOY COATED BATTERY GRID

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to the modification of battery grids of the type used in lead-acid storage batteries, and more particularly, it relates to a modification of the surface finish of the battery grids of a lead-acid storage battery to improve paste adhesion and the service life of the battery.

5 2. Description of the Related Art

Lead-acid storage batteries typically comprise several cell elements which are encased in separate compartments of a container containing sulfuric acid electrolyte. Each cell element includes at least one positive plate, at least one negative plate, and a porous separator positioned between each positive and negative plate. The positive and negative plates each comprise a lead or lead alloy grid that supports an electrochemically active material. The active material is a lead based material (i.e., PbO, PbO₂, Pb or PbSO₄ at different 10 charge/discharge stages of the battery) that is pasted onto the grid. The grids provide an electrical contact between the positive and negative active materials which serves to conduct current.

Lead-acid battery manufacturing technologies and materials have improved dramatically in the last few decades. One early revolution was the use 15 of battery grid materials that produce a "maintenance-free" battery. Because pure lead is too soft for the manufacturing processes used to form battery grids, various alloying elements have been added to lead over the years to produce battery grids of sufficient strength to withstand battery manufacturing processes. For example, antimony was added to lead as lead-antimony alloys were found to 20 be capable of being formed into battery grids at acceptable commercial rates by way of gravity casting techniques. However, it was discovered that when a lead-antimony alloy is used in battery grids, water loss occurs because of gassing.

Therefore, batteries having lead-antimony grids required periodic maintenance, i.e., the addition of water to the battery. In order to lower the gassing rate of batteries, lead-calcium battery grids were developed. Batteries using lead-calcium alloy grids have low gassing rates, and therefore, do not require the addition of water. As a result, the use of lead-calcium alloy battery grids has led to the introduction of "maintenance-free" batteries.

Another significant revolution in lead-acid battery manufacturing has been the manufacturing of battery plates in a continuous process, instead of the traditional methods in which battery grids are made using a conventional gravity cast book mold operation and the cast grids are later pasted in a separate step.

In a typical continuous battery plate making method, a lead alloy strip is manufactured, either by casting (namely, cast strip) or by casting and rolling (namely, wrought strip), and the strip is subsequently expanded or punched to generate the desired grid pattern in a strip of interconnected battery grids.

Typically, lead alloys having a relatively high level of calcium are used in continuous grid making processes as higher calcium levels tend to increase the hardness of the battery grids which is beneficial in punching and expansion processes. Previously prepared active material battery paste (which may be prepared by mixing lead oxide, sulfuric acid, water, and optionally dry additives, such as fiber and expander) is then applied to the strip of interconnected battery grids and the strip is parted into single battery plates. The main advantages of continuous battery plate making are production rate, dimensional control, thinner plates, lower strap rate and lower manufacturing costs. The pasted plates are next typically cured for many hours under elevated temperature and humidity to oxidize free lead (if any) and adjust the crystal structure of the plate. After curing, the plates are assembled into batteries and electrochemically formed by passage of current to convert the lead sulfate or basic lead sulfate(s) to lead dioxide (positive plates) or lead (negative plates). This is referred to as the "formation" process.

It is well known that lead-acid batteries will eventually fail in service through one or more of several failure modes. Among these failure modes is failure due

to corrosion of the grid surface. Electrochemical action corrodes the grid surface and reduces the adhesion between the active material and the grid. In most instances, failure of the battery occurs when the grids are no longer able to provide adequate structural support or current flow due to the separation of the active material from the grid. It has been determined that negative lead-acid battery plates made by a continuous plate making method as described above have performed at least as well in service (cycle) life as negative plates made from conventional gravity cast book mold grids. However, positive lead-acid battery plates made by a continuous plate making method underperform in service (cycle) life as compared to gravity cast book mold grids, especially in the 5 high temperature environment under the hood of today's more compact cars. In particular, lead-acid batteries having positive plates made by a continuous plate making method from lead-calcium alloys have proven to be relatively short-lived as determined by the SAE J240B Life Cycle Test (at 40°C and particularly at 10 75°C) owing to corrosion of the grid surface which forms an electrically resistive layer between the active material and the grid and seemingly reduces the adhesion between the active material and the grid over the course of the test. Lead-calcium grid batteries are particularly susceptible to early failure for the high 15 temperature (75°C) J240 test, and are short-lived compared to similar batteries made with lead-antimony grids.

Therefore, there have been efforts to improve the service life of a lead-acid battery having continuously manufactured plates, particularly by increasing the adhesion of positive grids to the active paste material. For example, a method for extending the cycle life of a lead-acid storage battery is disclosed in 20 U.S. Patent No. 5,858,575. In this method, a continuous length of unexpanded strip or a continuous length of preexpanded grid strip, each of which is formed from a lead-calcium alloy, is coated with a layer of a tin, lead-antimony, lead-silver or lead-tin alloy by hot dipping in a melt of the alloy. The layer of metal on the 25 surface of the grid promotes better adhesion of the active material paste to the grid.

Another similar method is described in U.S. Patent No. 4,906,540 which

discloses a method wherein a layer of a lead-tin-antimony alloy is roll-bonded to a strip formed of a lead-calcium alloy. The strip is then expanded into a continuous length of grids. It is stated that the surface layer of the lead-tin-antimony alloy enables the battery active material to be retained for a long period of time. The 5 increased adhesion of the paste to the grid serves to improve the cycle life of the battery.

Yet another similar method is described in Japanese Patent Publication No. 10-284085 which discloses a method wherein a coating of a lead-antimony-selenium alloy is fused to a lead-calcium-tin alloy strip and the strip is thereafter 10 punched and/or expanded to form battery grids. The grids formed by this process are believed to increase battery life.

Still another similar method is described in U.S. Patent No. 4,761,356 which discloses a method wherein a lead-calcium alloy strip is coated with a lead-tin alloy by dipping, spray coating or plating, and the coated alloy strip is 15 thereafter punched or expanded to form a continuous strip of battery grids. The use of a process wherein the lead-calcium strip is punched or expanded after coating with a lead-tin alloy produces a grid with the lead-calcium alloy exposed at areas where grid material is punched out of the strip. The alloy coating is reported to improve recovery after overdischarge.

20 The formation efficiency of lead-acid batteries also depends to a great extent on the positive plate, in particular, to the extent of conversion of lead monoxide (PbO) to lead dioxide (PbO_2) in the active positive material. The high electrical potential required for formation appears to be related to the transformation of non-conductive paste materials to PbO_2 . A low formation 25 efficiency of positive plates requires a high formation charge. Inefficient charging also leads to deficiencies in the resulting batteries assembled with such plates. Typically, the initial capacity (performance) of the battery is low if the battery is not completely formed, requiring additional cycling to reach specific performance values. It is well known that by increasing the adhesion between the paste 30 mixture and the grid, formation efficiency can be improved. Among other things, the increased adhesion between the grid and the paste provides for improved

interfacial contact between the grid and paste thereby improving current flow between the grid and paste.

Thus, it can be seen that the adhesion between a battery grid and battery active material may affect, among other things, battery formation processes and 5 battery service life. Accordingly, various methods, such as those mentioned above, have been proposed to improve the adhesion between a battery grid and battery active material, and thereby improve battery service life.

However, all of the aforementioned methods have certain disadvantages that limit the ability of these methods to attain maximum effectiveness in 10 improving battery service life. For instance, the methods disclosed in U.S. Patent Nos. 4,906,540 and 4,761,356 and Japanese Patent Publication No. 10-284085 all form a battery grid by applying an alloy coating to a strip and thereafter punching or expanding the strip to form battery grids. As a result, the alloy coating will not be present on the grid wire surfaces that face the openings that 15 are formed in the strip when the strip is punched or slit and expanded. Therefore, the beneficial effects of the alloy coating on paste adhesion and service life will be necessarily limited as the entire surface of the grid wires will not be coated. In addition, the coating methods disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,858,575 are used 20 with expanded metal grids (as shown in Figure 1 of U.S. Patent No. 5,858,575) which are known to have inferior charge/discharge efficiency as compared to stamped grids, such as that shown in U.S. Patent No. 5,989,749. The decreased charge/discharge efficiency of the expanded grids also limits the service (cycle) 25 life of a battery.

Therefore, there continues to be a need in the battery manufacturing field 25 for even more effective methods for improving the service life of a battery. More particularly, there is a need for a method that can more greatly increase the adherence of active material to a battery grid produced by a continuous process.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The foregoing needs in the art are achieved by a method of forming battery 30 grids or battery plates that includes the step of applying a lead alloy coating to a continuous strip of interconnected battery grids formed from a lead alloy grid

material. Each of the interconnected battery grids includes a grid network bordered by at least one frame element. The grid network comprises a plurality of spaced apart grid wire elements, each of which has opposed ends joined to one of a plurality of nodes thereby defining a plurality of open spaces in the grid network. In one version of the invention, the strip of interconnected battery grids is immersed in a melt of the lead alloy coating to apply the lead alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids. The alloy coated strip of interconnected battery grids is subsequently pasted and cut into individual battery plates, or cut into individual battery grids for later pasting.

10 Optionally, at least a portion of the grid wire elements are deformed (such as by coining) at a position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element before the lead alloy coating is applied to the strip of interconnected battery grids. This produces grid wire elements wherein a first transverse cross-section taken at the position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element differs from a second transverse cross-section taken at one of the opposed ends of the grid wire element. The strip of coated interconnected grids may also be quenched and thereafter age hardened.

15 Various methods may be used to form the strip of interconnected battery grids. For example, grid material may be punched out of a continuous strip of grid material to form the strip of interconnected battery grids. Alternatively, the strip of interconnected battery grids may be formed by slitting and expanding a continuous strip of grid material. Also, the strip of interconnected battery grids may be formed by continuously casting a melt of the grid material (e.g., on a rotating drum).

20 25 There are several advantages to coating the strip of interconnected battery grids after the grid network has been formed. First, the molten lead alloy coating transfers heat to the surface of the strip of interconnected battery grids thereby resolutionizing the surface of the strip of interconnected battery grids. The grains at the surface of the strip of interconnected battery grids recrystallize into larger grains which have an increased resistance to creep. Second, the alloy coating is applied to all surfaces of the grid network thereby improving paste adhesion on all

grid wire surfaces, not just the grid wire surfaces parallel to the longitudinal plane of the strip of interconnected grids. Third, the alloy coating provides a cast-like surface structure with increased surface area on all surfaces of the grid network thereby improving adhesion on all grid wire surfaces, not just the grid wire surfaces parallel to the longitudinal plane of the strip of interconnected grids. In addition, increased surface area reduces current density, corrosion rate and increases charging ability.

5 It is therefore an advantage of the present invention to provide a method that increases the cycle life of a battery by enhancing the adhesion between the 10 battery active material and the battery grid.

It is a further advantage to provide a method that increases the formation efficiency of a battery by enhancing the adhesion between the battery paste material and the battery grid.

15 It is yet another advantage to provide a method that can modify the shape of wires of a battery grid made from a continuous process so that the paste can flow around the grid wires to improve the plate strength.

It is still another advantage of the present invention to provide a method of 20 making battery grids that allows a battery manufacturer to take advantage of a low cost continuous grid making process without the drawbacks associated with inadequate paste adhesion such as reduced formation efficiency and reduced cycle life.

It is yet another advantage of the present invention to provide a method of 25 making battery plates or battery grids that produces a battery grid having increased grain size near the surface of the battery grid.

It is still another advantage of the present invention to provide a method of making battery plates or battery grids that produces a battery grid with increased surface area thereby increasing interfacial contact and mechanical bonding between the grid and battery paste.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

30 These and other features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention will become better understood upon consideration of the following

detailed description, appended claims and accompanying drawings where:

Figure 1 shows a front view of a battery grid made in accordance with one version of the method of the present invention;

5 Figure 2 shows a cross-section of a vertical grid wire section taken along line 2-2 of Figure 1;

Figure 3 shows a cross-section of a vertical grid wire section taken along line 3-3 of Figure 1;

10 Figure 4 shows a cross-section of a vertical grid wire section taken along line 4-4 of Figure 1;

Figure 5 shows a cross-section of a vertical grid wire section taken along line 5-5 of Figure 1;

Figure 6A shows a cross-section of a vertical grid wire section taken along line 6-6 of Figure 1;

15 Figure 6B shows a cross-section of a vertical grid wire section without an alloy coating taken along line 6-6 on Figure 1;

Figure 6C shows a cross-section of a vertical grid wire section having a partial alloy coating taken along the line 6-6 of Figure 1;

20 Figure 7A is a schematic illustration of one apparatus that may be used to practice the method of the present invention and produce a battery grid according to the invention;

Figure 7B is a schematic illustration of another apparatus that may be used to practice the method of the present invention and produce a battery grid according to the invention;

25 Figure 7C is a schematic illustration of yet another apparatus that may be used to practice the method of the present invention and produce a battery grid according to the invention;

Figure 7D is a schematic illustration of still another apparatus that may be used to practice the method of the present invention and produce a battery grid according to the invention;

30 Figure 8A is a schematic illustration of another apparatus that may be used to practice the method of the present invention and produce a battery grid

according to the invention;

Figure 8B is a schematic illustration of yet another apparatus that may be used to practice the method of the present invention and produce a battery grid according to the invention;

5 Figure 8C is a schematic illustration of still another apparatus that may be used to practice the method of the present invention and produce a battery grid according to the invention;

Figure 8D is a schematic illustration of another apparatus that may be used to practice the method of the present invention and produce a battery grid according to the invention;

10 Figure 9A is a schematic illustration of yet another apparatus that may be used to practice the method of the present invention and produce a battery grid according to the invention;

15 Figure 9B is a schematic illustration of still another apparatus that may be used to practice the method of the present invention and produce a battery grid according to the invention;

20 It should be understood that the drawings are not necessarily to scale and that the embodiments are sometimes illustrated by graphic symbols, phantom lines, diagrammatic representations and fragmentary views. In certain instances, details which are not necessary for an understanding of the present invention or which render other details difficult to perceive may have been omitted. It should be understood, of course, that the invention is not necessarily limited to the particular embodiments illustrated herein.

25 Like reference numerals will be used to refer to like or similar parts from Figure to Figure in the following description of the drawings.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Figure 1 shows a front view of a battery grid made in accordance with one version of the method of the present invention. The grid is a stamped grid made of a lead alloy grid material coated with a lead alloy, and functions in the same manner as other battery grids known in the art. It should be noted that an infinite number of grid designs may result from the present invention and therefore, it is

not the intent of the following description to limit the invention to the grid design shown in Figure 1, which is presented for the purposes of illustration.

Referring now to Figure 1, the grid 10 comprises a frame that includes a top frame element 12, first and second side frame elements 14 and 16, and a bottom frame element 18. The grid 10 includes a series of grid wires that define open areas 20 that hold the electrochemical paste (not shown) that provides the current generation. A current collection lug 22 is integral with the top frame element 12 and is offset from the center of the top frame element 12. The top frame element 12 includes an enlarged conductive section 24 directly beneath the lug 22, and has the shape shown to optimize current conduction to the lug 22.

A series of radially extending vertical grid wire elements 26a-26o form part of the grid 10. The vertical wire elements 26c-26n are connected to the top frame element 12 and the bottom frame element 18, the vertical wire elements 26a-26b are connected to the top frame element 12 in the first side frame element 14, and the vertical wire element 26o is connected to the top frame element 12 and the side frame element 16, as shown. The vertical wire element 26i is parallel to the side elements 14 and 16, and the remaining vertical wire elements 26a-26h and 26j-26o extend radially toward an imaginary intersecting point along a radius line running through the vertical element 26i. The vertical wire elements 26a-26o become closer together when moving from the bottom element 18 towards the top element 12 and get farther apart when moving towards the left element 14 or the right element 16 from the vertical element 26i.

The grid 10 also includes a plurality of horizontal or cross wire elements.

The cross wire elements include a set of parallel horizontal wire elements 30 positioned in a middle portion of the grid 10. Additionally, the grid 10 includes a first set of cross wire elements 32 connected between the left frame element 14 and the vertical element 26a that are parallel to each other, a second set of cross wire elements 34 connected between the vertical elements 26a and 26b that are parallel to each other, and a third set of cross wire elements 36 connected between the vertical elements 26b and 26c that are parallel to each other at the left side of the grid 10. Also, the grid 10 includes a fourth set of cross wire

elements 38 connected between the vertical elements 26n and 26o that are parallel to each other and a fifth set of cross wire elements 40 connected between the vertical element 26o and the right frame element 16 that are parallel to each other at the right side of the grid, as shown. A series of short support wires 42 are connected to the bottom frame member 18 as shown.

Individual sections of the vertical wire elements 26a-26o and the horizontal wire elements 30 or the cross wire elements 32-40 have opposed ends 43 which are joined at a plurality of nodes 44 that define the open areas 20 that support the electrochemical paste for conduction.

10 The grid wire cross-sections shown in Figures 2-6A illustrate various versions of a grid wire section formed by one version of the method of the invention described below. In the battery grid, each grid wire section may have a different cross-sectional configuration, or each grid wire section may have the same cross-sectional configuration. However, it is preferred that each grid wire section have the same cross-sectional configuration. It is also important to note 15 that although certain features of the invention have been illustrated in Figures 2-6A by way of cross-sectional views of vertical grid wires, the same cross-sectional views could apply when taking a cross-section of horizontal grid wires. In other words, the similar deformation methods as illustrated in Figures 2 to 6A can also 20 be applied to the horizontal wire elements. Depending on the needs, a grid can be deformed at the vertical wire elements only, or at both the vertical and horizontal wire elements, or not deformed at any of the wire elements.

Figure 2 shows a cross-section of a section of vertical wire element 26h taken at a position between the opposed ends of the grid wire section. It can be 25 seen that at the position between the opposed ends of this grid wire section, the cross-section of the grid wire includes a grid wire base 90a which is substantially an octagon, and an alloy coating 92a. Also shown in phantom at 93 is the interface between the grid wire base 90 and the alloy coating 92 below the 30 opposed flat planar surfaces 33 of the grid. It can be appreciated by those in the art that a battery grid wire section or node will not have a perfect geometric configuration and that the rounding of edges and corners of a grid wire section,

base, coating surface, or node is often the result of a manufacturing operation. For this reason, the description of cross-sectional shapes in the specification will be proceeded by the word "substantially" to indicate that the cross-sectional shape may vary somewhat from a perfect geometric shape.

5 Figure 3 shows a cross-section of a section of vertical wire element 26i taken at a position between the opposed ends of the grid wire section. It can be seen that at the position between the opposed ends of this grid wire section, the cross-section of the grid wire includes a grid wire base 90b has been rotated 45 degrees in relation to the node and has a substantially rectangular cross-section. 10 The cross-section of the grid wire also shows an alloy coating 92b. Also shown in phantom at 93 is the interface between the grid wire base 90b and the alloy coating 92b below the opposed flat planar surfaces 33 of the grid.

15 Figure 4 shows a cross-section of a section of vertical wire element 26j taken at a position between the opposed ends of the grid wire section. It can be seen that at the position between the opposed ends of this grid wire section, the cross-section of the grid wire includes a grid wire base 90c which is substantially a hexagon and an alloy coating 92c. The grid wire base 90c has opposed surfaces which are coplanar with the surface of the adjacent nodes. Also shown in phantom at 93 is the interface between the grid wire base 90c and the alloy coating 92c below the opposed flat planar surfaces 33 of the grid. 20

25 Figure 5 shows a cross-section of a section of vertical wire element 26k taken at a position between the opposed ends of the grid wire section. It can be seen that at the position between the opposed ends of this grid wire section, the cross-section of the grid wire includes a grid wire base 90d which is substantially a diamond and an alloy coating 92d. Also shown in phantom at 93 is the interface between the grid wire base 90d and the alloy coating 92d below the opposed flat planar surfaces 33 of the grid.

30 Figure 6A shows a cross-section of a section of vertical wire element 26l taken at a position between the opposed ends of the grid wire section. This figure shows the configuration of a conventional stamped battery grid wherein the cross section of the node and the cross-section at all positions along the grid wire

section are substantially rectangular and the surfaces of the node and grid wire section (which includes a grid wire base 90e) include an alloy coating 92e. Also shown in phantom at 93 is the interface between the grid wire base 90e and the alloy coating 92e below the opposed flat planar surfaces 33 of the grid.

5 Figure 6B shows another version of the cross-section of a section of vertical wire element 26l taken at a position between the opposed ends of the grid wire section wherein the grid does not include an alloy coating. It can be seen that the cross-section of the node and the cross-section at all positions along the grid wire section are substantially rectangular and the cross-sectional area of each grid wire does not extend above or below opposed flat planar surfaces 33 of the grid.

10 15 Figure 6C shows yet another version of the cross-section of a section of vertical wire element 26l taken at a position between the opposed ends of the grid wire section. In this cross-section of the grid wire, there is shown a grid wire base 90g and an alloy coating 92g. The alloy coating 92g is disposed on the flat planar surfaces 33 of the grid; however, no alloy coating is present on surfaces 91g of the grid wire element that are transverse to the flat planar surfaces 33. The grid of Figure 6C may be produced by the method of U.S. Patent Nos. 4,906,540 and 4,761,356.

20 25 30 One advantage of the battery grid construction shown in Figures 2-6A can be best understood with reference to Figures 6A and 6B. Figure 6A shows the configuration of a conventional stamped battery grid that has been coating with an alloy coating 92e after stamping. The cross section of the node and the cross-section at all positions along the grid wire section comprising the grid wire base 90e are substantially rectangular. However, the surface of the alloy coating 92e is slightly rounded at the regions near the four corners of the grid wire base 90e. When applying battery paste to a grid as in Figure 6A, the slightly rounded grid wires allow the paste to flow around the wire. The rough surface of the wires provide a mechanical graft and interlock of paste particles. Therefore, the contact between the grid and the battery paste is good and the plate is strong. Figure 6B shows the configuration of a conventional stamped battery grid wherein the cross

section of the node and the cross-section at all positions along the grid wire section 90f are substantially rectangular. When applying battery paste to a grid as in Figure 6B, it is much more difficult to make good contact between the 5 battery paste and the surface of the wire moving in a direction perpendicular to the direction in which the paste is applied because the flow of paste must change in a 90 degree step. This is analogous to the situation where water flows down a 90 degree cliff, and the surface right below the edge of the cliff is not contacted by the falling water. With a grid wire orientation other than 90 degrees, the change of paste flow is gradual and continuous and therefore, provides better paste 10 coverage. When the battery paste is cured and dried, it will shrink and generate tensile force at the paste / grid interface. The tensile force at the paste / grid wire interface is at a maximum when the wire surface is perpendicular to the grid surface and at a minimum when the wire surface is parallel to the grid surface. As a result, a gap is formed between the grid wire and the paste at the location 15 where the tensile force is the maximum. This type of plate is weak and the paste will fall off easily. Because of a lack of contact between the paste and the grid, a battery made with this type of plate is much more difficult to form, performs poorly in certain reserve capacity tests, and does not exhibit satisfactory cycle life.

Having shown an exemplary alloy coated battery grid that may be 20 produced by one version of the invention, a number of apparatus for forming battery grids in accordance with the invention may be described. In Figure 7A, there is shown one apparatus, indicated generally at 50, for practicing the method of the present invention and for forming a battery grid in accordance with the invention. The apparatus 50 includes a heated lead pot 61a, which contains the 25 molten lead alloy 62 that forms the base of the battery grids, and an internally cooled rotating casting drum 63. In operation, the molten lead alloy 62 contacts the cooled drum surface and freezes to form a solid lead alloy strip 65 of substantially constant width and thickness. A suitable lead alloy strip drum casting device that may be used in the apparatus 50 is shown and described in 30 U.S. Patent No. 3,926,247 or U.S. Patent No. 5,462,109, which are incorporated herein by reference. The lead alloy strip 65 may optionally be rolled by rollers 64

to change the thickness and grain structure of the strip 65. The continuous strip 65 is then fed into a punching station 71 wherein a series of interconnected battery grids is formed by punching grid material out of the continuous strip 65.

5 During punching operations in the punching station 71, the strip 65 is maintained as a continuous strip and preferably the interconnected battery grid shapes and formed in a progressive punching operation, i.e., features are added to the battery grid through several punching operations. The punching station 71 may form a strip of interconnected battery grids, each of which has a configuration such as that shown in Figure 1.

10 After the strip exists the punching station 71, the battery grid wire sections of the strip may optionally be processed in a coining station 73. The coining station 73 is used to deform or coin the grid wires so that the grid wires have a cross-section similar to one of the grid wire cross-sections 90a, 90b, 90c or 90d shown in Figures 2-5. For instance, the coining station 73, may include a die or dies that deform the rectangular cross-section of the grid wires of the punched grid into an octagonal cross-section 90a as shown in Figure 2. The other exemplary wire cross-sections shown in Figures 3-5 may also be formed. The strip of punched (and optionally, coined) interconnected battery grids 74 exiting the punching station 71 (and optionally, the coining station 73) is fed through an alloy coating bath 76 that contains a molten lead alloy 77 to form a strip of alloy-coated interconnected battery grids 79. The length of the alloy coating bath 76 may vary with the composition of the molten lead alloy 77, the thickness of the alloy coating to be deposited, and the rate at which the strip of punched interconnected battery grids 74 moves through the alloy coating bath 76. The strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 is then fed through a quench bath 83 containing quench fluid 84 (preferably water) and is coiled onto a take up reel 85. The quenching preserves the resolutionized grains of the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 in a much more stable condition. The reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 may then be age hardened. While the reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 can be age hardened at room temperature (i.e., 25°C), it is preferred to age harden the reel of alloy

coated interconnected battery grids 79 at an elevated temperature (i.e., above 25°C). Thereafter, the reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 may be uncoiled and fed to a paster (such as that shown and described in U.S. Patent No. 4,606,383) and parted into battery plates (as is known in the art) for assembly into a battery. Alternatively, the reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 may be uncoiled and divided into individual battery grids which are subsequently pasted to form battery plates.

In Figure 7B, there is shown another apparatus, indicated generally at 51, for practicing the method of the invention and for forming a battery grid in accordance with the invention. In the apparatus 51, a strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 is produced using the casting drum 63, the punching station 71, the coining station 73 (if desired), the alloy coating bath 76 and the quench tank 83 as in the apparatus 50 of Figure 7A. However, in the apparatus 51 of Figure 7B, the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 enters an oven 86 after exiting the quench tank 83 in order to immediately age harden the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 after quenching. After age hardening in the oven 86, the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 is fed through a paster 87 where conventional battery paste is applied to the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79. A strip of pasted alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79a exits the paster 87 and is separated into individual battery plates in a paster 88 before assembly into a battery.

In Figure 7C, there is shown another apparatus, indicated generally at 52, for practicing the method of the invention. In the apparatus 52, a lead alloy strip 65 is formed using the casting drum 63 as in the apparatus 50 of Figure 7A. The lead alloy strip 65 is then expanded into a strip of interconnected battery grids 75 in an expander 72. A suitable apparatus for expanding the lead alloy strip 65 into the strip of interconnected battery grids 75 is shown and described in U.S. Patent No. 4,291,443 which is incorporated herein by reference. After the strip of interconnected battery grids 75 exits the expander 72, the battery grid wire sections of the strip may optionally be processed in a coining station 73 as

described above with reference to the apparatus 50 of Figure 7A. The strip of interconnected battery grids 75 is then fed through the alloy coating bath 76 to form a strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80 which is quenched in quench tank 83 and coiled onto take up reel 85. The reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80 may then be heated to age harden the interconnected battery grids 80. The strip of interconnected battery grids 80 may be uncoiled and fed to a paster and parted into battery plates that are assembled into a battery. Alternatively, the reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80 may be uncoiled and divided into individual battery grids which are subsequently pasted to form battery plates.

In Figure 7D, there is shown another apparatus, indicated generally at 53, for practicing the method of the invention. In the apparatus 53, a strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80 is produced using the casting drum 63, the expander 72, the coining station 73, the alloy coating bath 76 and the quench tank 83 as in the apparatus 52 of Figure 7C. However, in the apparatus 53 of Figure 7D, the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80 enters an oven 86 immediately after exiting the quench tank 83 in order to age harden the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80. After age hardening in the oven 86, the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80 is fed through a paster 87 where conventional battery paste is applied to the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80. A strip of pasted alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80a exits the paster 87 and is separated into individual battery plates in a parter 88 before assembly into a battery.

While the apparatus 52 of Figure 7C and the apparatus 53 of Figure 7D provide suitable results when used to practice the present invention, the apparatus 50 of Figure 7A and the apparatus 51 of Figure 7B are particularly advantageous in that complex battery grid shapes (such as that shown in Figure 1) may be produced using the punching station 71 and optionally, the coining station 73. Specifically, the expander 72 used in the apparatus 52 of Figure 7C and the apparatus 53 of Figure 7D produces a continuous length of expanded metal grids that are limited in wire pattern, wire shape, and lead distribution. In

contrast, the apparatus 50 of Figure 7A and the apparatus 51 of Figure 7B produce a continuous length of punched grids having optimized grid wire patterns, asymmetric and offset grid wire patterns, improved grid wire thickness control (grid wire aspect ratios), improved grid wire shape control, improved lead distribution in the grid (percent lead distribution from the top to the bottom of the grid), and grain control. As a result, the corrosion performance is enhanced because of the relatively stress free grain structure and low porosity of the punched sheet. In addition, the punching process does not substantially deform the grain or add other stresses into the grid which might lead to corrosion initiation sites. The electrical performance is enhanced as a result of unique and optimized grid wire patterns, improved control of grid wire size and optimized lead distribution within the grid. Thus, the apparatus 50 of Figure 7A and the apparatus 51 of Figure 7B produce a battery grid that has the advantages of optimized grid wire patterns and the advantages of an alloy coating.

In Figure 8A, there is shown another apparatus, indicated generally at 54, for practicing the method of the present invention and for forming a battery grid in accordance with the invention. The apparatus 54 includes a heated lead pot 61b, which contains the molten lead alloy 62 that forms the base of the battery grids, and a pair of twin casting rollers 66. In operation, the molten lead alloy 62 contacts the roller surfaces and freezes to form a solid lead alloy strip 68 of substantially constant width and thickness. A suitable lead alloy strip roll casting device that may be used in the apparatus 54 is shown and described in U.S. Patent No. 4,498,519, which is incorporated herein by reference. The lead alloy strip 68 may optionally be further rolled by rollers 67 to change the thickness and grain structure of the strip 68. The continuous strip 68 is then fed into a punching station 71 wherein a series of interconnected battery grids is formed by punching grid material out of the continuous strip 68.

During punching operations in the punching station 71, the strip 68 is maintained as a continuous strip and preferably the interconnected battery grid shapes and formed in a progressive punching operation, i.e., features are added to the battery grid through several punching operations. The punching station 71

may form a strip of interconnected battery grids, each of which has a configuration such as that shown in Figure 1.

After the strip exists the punching station 71, the battery grid wire sections of the strip may optionally be processed in a coining station 73. The coining station 73 is used to deform or coin the grid wires so that the grid wires have a cross-section similar to one of the grid wire cross-sections 90a, 90b, 90c or 90d shown in Figures 2-5. For instance, the coining station 73, may include a die or dies that deform the rectangular cross-section of the grid wires of the punched grid into an octagonal cross-section 90a as shown in Figure 2. The other exemplary wire cross-sections shown in Figures 3-5 may also be formed. The strip of punched (and optionally, coined) interconnected battery grids 74 exiting the punching station 71 (and optionally, the coining station 73) is then fed through an alloy coating bath 76 that contains a molten lead alloy 77 to form a strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79, as described with reference to Figure 7A. The strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 is then fed through a quench fluid 84 and is coiled onto a take up reel 85. The reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 may then be heated to age harden the interconnected battery grids 79. The reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 may be uncoiled and fed to a paster and parted into battery plates that are assembled into a battery. Alternatively, the reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 may be uncoiled and divided into individual battery grids which are subsequently pasted to form battery plates.

In Figure 8B, there is shown another apparatus, indicated generally at 55, for practicing the method of the invention and for forming a battery grid in accordance with the invention. In the apparatus 55, a strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 is produced using the twin roll caster 66, the punching station 71, the coining station 73 (if desired), the alloy coating bath 76 and the quench tank 83 as in the apparatus 54 of Figure 8A. However, in the apparatus 55 of Figure 8B, the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 enters an oven 86 after exiting the quench tank 83 in order to age harden the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79. After age hardening, the

strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79 is fed through a paster 87 where conventional battery paste is applied to the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79. A strip of pasted alloy coated interconnected battery grids 79a exits the paster 87 and is separated into individual battery plates 5 in a parter 88.

In Figure 8C, there is shown another apparatus, indicated generally at 56, for practicing the method of the invention. In the apparatus 56, a lead alloy strip 68 is formed using the twin roll caster 66 as in the apparatus 54 of Figure 8A. The lead alloy strip 68 is then expanded into a strip of interconnected battery grids 75 in an expander 72. A suitable apparatus for expanding the lead alloy strip 68 into the strip of interconnected battery grids 75 is shown and described in 10 U.S. Patent No. 4,291,443. After the strip of interconnected battery grids 75 exits the expander 72, the battery grid wire sections of the strip may optionally be processed in a coining station 73 as described above with reference to the apparatus 50 of Figure 7A. The strip of interconnected battery grids 75 is then 15 fed through the alloy coating bath 76 to form a strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80 which is quenched in quench tank 83 and coiled onto take up reel 85. The reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80 may then be heated 20 to age harden the interconnected battery grids 80. The strip of interconnected battery grids 80 may be uncoiled and fed to a paster and parted into battery plates that are assembled into a battery. Alternatively, the reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80 may be uncoiled and divided into individual battery grids which are subsequently pasted to form battery plates.

In Figure 8D, there is shown another apparatus, indicated generally at 57, 25 for practicing the method of the invention. In the apparatus 57, a strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80 is produced using the twin roll caster 66, the expander 72, the coining station 73 (if desired), the alloy coating bath 76 and the quench tank 83 as in the apparatus 56 of Figure 8C. However, in the 30 apparatus 57 of Figure 8D, the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80 enters an oven 80 after exiting the quench tank 83 in order to age harden the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80. After age hardening, the

strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80 is fed through a paster 87 where conventional battery paste is applied to the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80. A strip of pasted alloy coated interconnected battery grids 80a exits the paster 87 and is separated into individual battery plates in a parter 88.

5 In Figure 9A, there is shown another apparatus, indicated generally at 58, for practicing the method of the present invention and for forming a battery grid in accordance with the invention. The apparatus 58 includes a heated lead pot 61c, which contains the molten lead alloy 62 that forms the base of the battery grids, and a casting drum 69. In operation, the molten lead alloy 62 contacts the casting drum surfaces and freezes to form a strip of interconnected battery grids 70. A suitable casting device that may be used in the apparatus 58 to form the strip of interconnected battery grids 70 is shown and described in U.S. Patent No. 4,349,067, which is incorporated herein by reference. Optionally, the strip of 10 interconnected battery grids 70 removed from the surface of the casting drum 69 may be fed through one or more sets of rollers 98 in order to reduce the thickness of the strip of interconnected battery grids 70 as is shown and described in U.S. Patent No. 5,611,128, which is incorporated herein by reference. The strip of 15 interconnected battery grids 70 is then fed through an alloy coating bath 76 that contains a molten lead alloy 77 to form a strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 81, as described with reference to Figure 7A. The strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 81 is then fed through a quench fluid 84 and is coiled onto a take up reel 85. The reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 81 may then be heated to age harden the interconnected battery grids 81. 20 The reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 81 may be uncoiled and fed to a paster and parted into battery plates that are assembled into a battery. Alternatively, the reel of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 81 may be uncoiled and divided into individual battery grids which are subsequently pasted to form battery plates.

25 30 In Figure 9B, there is shown another apparatus, indicated generally at 59, for practicing the method of the present invention and for forming a battery grid in

accordance with the invention. In the apparatus 59, a strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 81 is produced using the casting drum 69, optionally the rollers 98, the alloy coating bath 76 and the quench tank 83 as in the apparatus 58 of Figure 9A. However, in the apparatus 59 of Figure 9B, the strip 5 of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 81 enters an oven 86 after exiting the quench tank 83 in order to age harden the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 81. After age hardening, the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 81 is fed through a paster 87 where conventional battery paste is applied to the strip of alloy coated interconnected battery grids 81. A strip of 10 pasted alloy coated interconnected battery grids 81a exits the paster 87 and is separated into individual battery plates in a parter 88.

Various modifications may be made to the apparatus of Figures 7A-9B. For instance, the strip of interconnected battery grids 74 may optionally be fed 15 through a fluxing station (not shown) before entering the alloy coating bath 76 in order to remove oxides from the surface of the strip of interconnected battery grids 74. A fluxing station may include a pool of flux in a tray underlying the advancing strip of interconnected battery grids 74, a rotating roller that absorbs and picks up flux from the pool and applies it to the underside of the strip of interconnected battery grids 74, and a nozzle overlying the strip of interconnected 20 battery grids 74 for spraying flux onto the topside of the strip of interconnected battery grids 74. Other techniques, e.g. wetted sponges/applicators, for applying the flux to the strip of interconnected battery grids 74 may also be used. In another version of the invention, the alloy coating may be applied to the strip of 25 interconnected battery grids 74 by spraying the alloy onto the strip of interconnected battery grids 74.

Another highly advantageous modification may be made to the apparatus of Figures 7A-9B. Specifically, the alloy coating bath 76 is modified such that a stream of inert gas (e.g., nitrogen or argon) may be purged or blown into the 30 molten lead alloy 77 in the alloy coating bath 76. During coating of the strip of interconnected battery grids 74 in the alloy coating bath 76, the inert gas (e.g., nitrogen or argon) is blown into the molten lead alloy 77 such that bubbles form in

the molten lead alloy 77. This provides at least three advantages: (1) the alloy coating that forms on the strip of interconnected battery grids 74 is porous and therefore, has a much higher surface area, which further enhances the grid/active material adhesion; (2) the alloy coating that forms on the strip of interconnected battery grids 74 has a lower mass and lower cost as compared to an alloy coating that forms on the strip of interconnected battery grids 74 without the introduction of inert gas into the molten lead alloy 77; (3) the inert gas acts as a shielding film as it is leaving the alloy coating bath 76 which prevents the top of the molten alloy bath from oxidizing thereby reducing dross and contamination of the alloy coating bath 76.

Having described various methods and apparatus for forming battery plates or battery grids in accordance with the invention, example grid materials and example coating materials that may be used to form a battery grid in accordance with the invention may be described. The lead alloy used to produce the solid lead alloy strip 65 in the casting drum 63 of the apparatus of any of Figures 7A-7D is selected in order to provide a cast alloy strip that may be punched or expanded into a strip of interconnected battery grids having an alloy composition suitable for the intended application of the lead-acid battery. For example, if a lead-acid battery is to be sold as a "maintenance-free" battery, a lead-calcium alloy will be selected for use as the lead alloy applied to the casting drum 63. It is well known in the art that an alloy having lead and calcium may also contain other alloyants such as tin, aluminum and silver. Accordingly, as used herein, the term "lead-calcium alloy" is not intended to be limited strictly to binary lead-calcium alloys, but shall also include alloys having lead and calcium as well as other alloying elements which are not deleterious to the battery or the maintenance-free character thereof. The alloying elements in the lead alloy can be varied to provide optimum performance of the casting drum 63 of the apparatus of any of Figures 7A-7D.

Likewise, the lead alloy used to produce the solid lead alloy strip 68 in the twin roll casting rollers 66 of the apparatus of any of Figures 8A-8D may be selected in order to provide a cast alloy strip that may be punched or expanded

into a strip of interconnected battery grids having an alloy composition suitable for the intended application of the lead-acid battery. If a lead-acid battery is to be sold as a "maintenance-free" battery, a lead-calcium alloy as defined herein will be selected for use as the lead alloy applied to the twin roll casting rollers 66.

5 The alloying elements in the lead alloy can be varied to provide optimum performance of the casting drum 66. Similarly, the lead alloy used to produce the strip of interconnected battery grids 81 using the casting drum 69 of the apparatus of any of Figures 9A-9B may be selected in order to provide a strip of interconnected battery grids 81 having an alloy composition suitable for the 10 intended application of the lead-acid battery. If a lead-acid battery is to be sold as a "maintenance-free" battery, a lead-calcium alloy as defined herein will be selected for use as the lead alloy applied to the casting drum 69. The alloying elements in the lead alloy can be varied to provide optimum performance of the casting drum 69. One example lead-calcium alloy that is useful in the present 15 invention includes lead, from about 0.060 wt.% to about 0.070 wt.% calcium, and from about 1.20 wt.% to about 1.50 wt.% tin. Another example lead-calcium alloy that is useful in the present invention includes lead, no less than about 0.8% tin, tin in a ratio to calcium of greater than about 12:1, and silver in the range of about 0 to about 0.02%, the percentages being based upon the total weight of the lead-based alloy. This example lead-calcium alloy is fully described in U.S. Patent No. 20 6,117,594.

As detailed above, each of the apparatus shown in Figures 7A-9B produces a strip of interconnected battery grids that is subsequently coated with a lead alloy in the alloy coating bath 76. The lead alloy selected for the coating varies depending on the alloy used to produce the strip of interconnected battery grids. When the strip of interconnected battery grids is formed from a lead-calcium alloy as defined herein, suitable lead alloys for the coating include lead-tin and lead-antimony alloys. The precise composition of the coating is not particularly critical in terms of extending the lives of batteries. On the other hand, 25 there are two general rules applicable to the selection of the lead alloy coating 30 composition. First, the composition of the coating should be selected so as to

provide a melt having a melting point which is sufficiently less than the melting point of the lead-calcium alloy strip of interconnected battery grids (e.g., about 620°F for a typical Pb - 0.07 wt.% Ca - 1 to 1.5 wt.% tin alloy) so as to preclude complete melting of the strip of interconnected battery grids while it is immersed 5 in the melt. Melting of the surface of the lead-calcium alloy strip of interconnected battery grids is acceptable and, in fact, may be desirable to promote metallurgical bonding of the alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids. Second, the composition of the coating should be such that there is sufficient tin, antimony 10 or other alloying elements present to dope the corrosion layer on the surface of the strip of interconnected battery grids (i.e., at the grid-active material interface) with oxides of the tin, antimony or other alloying elements, and thereby improve the conductivity of the corrosion layer and promote better adhesion of the leady active material to the grid.

Suitable lead-antimony alloys for coating the strip of interconnected battery 15 grids include lead alloys having an antimony content varying from about 1% by weight to about 10% by weight. Other additives such as tin from about 1 wt.% to about 10 wt.% may also be used with the antimonial lead. Hence, the term lead-antimony alloy is not intended to be limited to alloys containing just lead and antimony, but rather is intended to include other low melting alloys thereof which 20 do not negate the intended effects of the antimony or are otherwise deleterious to a battery. For coating a Pb-Ca-Sn alloy (i.e., 0.07 wt.% Ca, and 1 to 1.5 wt.% Sn) strip of interconnected battery grids which melts at about 620°F, the antimony content in the lead alloy coating will preferably be between about 0.5 wt.% and about 3 wt.%, and preferably the tin content in the lead alloy will be between 25 about 2 wt.% and about 5 wt.% so as to have a melting point of about 590°F.

Similarly, suitable lead-tin alloys may be used as all melt at lower 30 temperatures than the typical lead-calcium alloy strip of interconnected battery grids. Lead-tin alloys will preferably comprise about 1 wt.% to about 10 wt.% tin, but otherwise will be determined primarily on the basis of cost owing to the high cost of tin. One example alloy includes lead and about 4 wt.% to about 6 wt.% tin. Other alloyants could be added and therefore, the term lead-tin alloy is not

intended to be limited to alloys containing just lead and tin, but rather intended to include other low melting alloys thereof which do not negate the intended effects of the tin or are otherwise deleterious to a battery or the maintenance-free character thereof.

5 The precise temperature of the melt is not particularly critical so long as it is not so hot as to completely melt the strip of interconnected battery grids in the brief time that the strip of interconnected battery grids are immersed in the melt. Hence, the melt temperature will, in many respects, be determined by the composition (and hence melting point) of the strip of interconnected battery grids 10 being coated. Generally speaking, it is preferred that the temperature of the melt be maintained at a temperature that is at least about 20°F below the melting point of the strip of interconnected battery grids. On the other hand, it is desirable that the temperature be sufficiently high as to melt some low melting phases on the surface of the strip of interconnected battery grids to promote better bonding of 15 the coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids.

The invention is further illustrated in the following Examples which are presented for purposes of illustration and not of limitation.

Example 1

20 A continuous strip was prepared from a lead-alloy having the following composition: 0.0425 wt.% calcium, 0.925 wt.% tin, 0.013 wt.% aluminum, 0.0125 wt.% silver and balance lead. A series of interconnected battery grid shapes were then formed in the strip in a progressive punching operation, i.e., features 25 were added to the battery grid through several punching operations. The battery grid wire sections of the strip were then processed in a coining station to coin the grid wires so that the grid wires had a cross-section similar to the grid wire cross-sections 90c in Figure 4. The interconnected battery grids were then divided into individual grids. The grids were then pasted with a conventional battery paste 30 and formed into battery cells. The battery cells were then cycled in accordance with the SAE J240 life test procedure at a temperature of 75°C (167°F) to measure the service life.

Example 2

A continuous strip was prepared from a lead-alloy having the following composition: 0.0425 wt.% calcium, 0.925 wt.% tin, 0.013 wt.% aluminum, 0.0125 wt.% silver and balance lead. A series of interconnected battery grid shapes 5 were then formed in the strip in a progressive punching operation, i.e., features were added to the battery grid through several punching operations. The battery grid wire sections of the strip were then processed in a coining station to coin the grid wires so that the grid wires had a cross-section similar to the grid wire cross-sections 90c in Figure 4. The interconnected battery grids were then divided into 10 individual grids. The grids were then hand dipped into a pot of molten 94 wt.% lead - 6 wt.% tin coating alloy. The grids were dipped slowly into the melt until they bottomed out in the pot and then slowly withdrawn at the same rate for a total immersion time of about 2 seconds. The coating was uniform with no excess buildup on the grid wires or the edges of the grids. The grids were then pasted 15 with a conventional battery paste and formed into battery cells. The battery cells were then cycled in accordance with the SAE J240 life test procedure at a temperature of 75°C (167°F) to measure the service life. The number of cycles for battery cells having lead -tin alloy coated grids prepared in accordance with Example 2 was 20% higher than the number of cycles for the control battery cells 20 having uncoated grids prepared in accordance with Example 1. This demonstrates that batteries including grids made in accordance with the present invention will have better cycle life performance than batteries including conventional grids.

Example 3

A continuous strip was prepared from a lead-alloy having the following 25 composition: 0.0425 wt.% calcium, 0.925 wt.% tin, 0.013 wt.% aluminum, 0.0125 wt.% silver and balance lead. A series of interconnected battery grid shapes were then formed in the strip in a progressive punching operation, i.e., features 30 were added to the battery grid through several punching operations. The battery grid wire sections of the strip were then processed in a coining station to coin the grid wires so that the grid wires had a cross-section similar to the grid wire cross-

sections 90c in Figure 4. The interconnected battery grids were then divided into individual grids. The grids were then hand dipped into a pot of molten 94 wt.% lead - 3 wt.% tin - 3 wt.% antimony coating alloy. The grids were dipped slowly into the melt until they bottomed out in the pot and then slowly withdrawn at the same rate for a total immersion time of about 2 seconds. The coating was uniform with no excess buildup on the grid wires or the edges of the grids. The grids were then pasted with a conventional battery paste and formed into battery cells. The battery cells were then cycled in accordance with the SAE J240 life test procedure at a temperature of 75°C (167°F) to measure the service life. The number of cycles for battery cells having lead - tin - antimony alloy coated grids prepared in accordance with Example 3 was 47% higher at the last reading than the number of cycles for the control battery cells having uncoated grids prepared in accordance with Example 1. In addition, the battery cells of Example 3 continue on test as the lower voltage cutoff for the SAE J240 has not been reached. This demonstrates that batteries including grids made in accordance with the present invention will have better cycle life performance than batteries including conventional grids.

Thus, the present invention provides a method that can increase the adherence of battery active material to a battery grid produced by a continuous process, such as strip expansion, strip punching, or continuous casting. The method of the present invention increases the cycle life of a battery by enhancing the adhesion between the battery paste material and the battery grid. As a result, a battery manufacturer can take advantage of a low cost continuous grid making process without the drawbacks associated with inadequate paste adhesion.

Although the present invention has been described in considerable detail with reference to certain embodiments, one skilled in the art will appreciate that the present invention can be practiced by other than the described embodiments, which have been presented for purposes of illustration and not of limitation. Therefore, the scope of the appended claims should not be limited to the description of the embodiments contained herein.

CLAIMS

What Is Claimed Is:

1. A method of making a plurality of battery plates, the method comprising:
 - forming a strip of interconnected battery grids from a lead alloy grid material, each interconnected battery grid including a grid network bordered by at least one frame element, the grid network comprising a plurality of spaced apart grid wire elements, each grid wire element having opposed ends, each opposed end being joined to one of a plurality of nodes to define a plurality of open spaces in the grid network;
 - applying a lead alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids;
 - applying battery paste to the strip of interconnected battery grids; and
 - cutting the strip of interconnected battery grids to form a plurality of battery plates.
2. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
 - deforming at least a portion of the grid wire elements at a position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element before applying the lead alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids such that a first transverse cross-section taken at the position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element differs from a second transverse cross-section taken at one of the opposed ends of the grid wire element.
3. The method of claim 2 wherein the step of deforming at least a portion of the grid wire elements comprises:
 - stamping the grid wire element at the position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element.
4. The method of claim 3 wherein:
 - the grid network and each of the frames define opposed substantially

planar surfaces, and each first transverse cross-section does not extend beyond the planar surfaces.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of forming a strip of interconnected battery grids from a grid material comprises:

feeding a continuous strip of the grid material along a linear path aligned with the longitudinal direction of the strip; and

punching grid material out of the strip to form the strip of interconnected battery grids.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein:

the continuous strip of the grid material is formed by a continuously casting a melt of the lead alloy grid material.

7. The method of claim 5 wherein:

the continuous strip of the grid material is formed by a casting a melt of the lead alloy grid material to form a slab and rolling the slab.

8. The method of claim 5 further comprising:

deforming at least a portion of the grid wire elements at a position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element before applying the lead alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids such that a first transverse cross-section taken at the position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element differs from a second transverse cross-section taken at one of the opposed ends of the grid wire element.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of forming a strip of interconnected battery grids from a grid material comprises:

feeding a continuous strip of the grid material along a linear path aligned with the longitudinal direction of the strip;

forming slits in the strip of grid material; and

laterally expanding the strip of grid material to form the strip of interconnected battery grids.

10. The method of claim 9 further comprising:
deforming at least a portion of the grid wire elements at a position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element before applying the lead alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids such that a first transverse cross-section taken at the position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element differs from a second transverse cross-section taken at one of the opposed ends of the grid wire element.

11. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of forming a strip of interconnected battery grids from a grid material comprises:

melting the grid material; and
continuously casting the grid material to form the strip of interconnected battery grids.

12. The method of claim 11 further comprising:
deforming at least a portion of the grid wire elements at a position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element before applying the lead alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids such that a first transverse cross-section taken at the position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element differs from a second transverse cross-section taken at one of the opposed ends of the grid wire element.

13. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of applying a lead alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids comprises:

immersing the strip of interconnected battery grids in a melt of the lead alloy coating.

14. The method of claim 13 wherein the step of applying a lead alloy

coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids further comprises:

introducing a gas into the melt of the lead alloy coating while immersing the strip of interconnected battery grids in the melt of the lead alloy coating.

15. The method of claim 13 wherein the grid material comprises a lead-calcium alloy and the coating comprises a lead-tin alloy.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein the lead-tin alloy comprises about 90 wt. % to about 99 wt. % lead and about 1 wt. % to about 10 wt. % tin.

17. The method of claim 15 wherein the lead-tin alloy further includes antimony.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein the lead-tin alloy comprises about 80 wt. % to about 98 wt. % lead, about 1 wt. % to about 10 wt. % tin, and about 1 wt. % to about 10 wt. % antimony.

19. The method of claim 1 wherein the step of applying a lead alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids comprises:

spraying a melt of the lead alloy coating on the strip of interconnected battery grids.

20. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
quenching the strip of interconnected battery grids in a fluid bath after applying the lead alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids and before applying battery paste to the strip of interconnected battery grids.

21. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
age hardening the strip of interconnected battery grids at an elevated temperature after quenching the strip of interconnected battery grids and before applying battery paste to the strip of interconnected battery grids.

22. A method of making a plurality of battery plates, the method comprising:

- melting a lead alloy grid material;
- continuously casting the grid material to form a continuous strip;
- punching grid material out of the strip to form interconnected battery grids, each interconnected battery grid including a grid network bordered by a frame, the frame having a current collector lug, the grid network comprising a plurality of spaced apart grid wire elements, each grid wire element having opposed ends, each opposed end being joined to one of a plurality of nodes to define a plurality of open spaces in the grid network;
- applying a lead alloy coating to the interconnected battery grids;
- applying battery paste to the interconnected battery grids; and
- cutting the interconnected battery grids to form a plurality of battery plates.

23. The method of claim 22 wherein the step of applying a lead alloy coating to the interconnected battery grids comprises:

- immersing the interconnected battery grids in a melt of the lead alloy coating.

24. The method of claim 23 wherein the step of applying a lead alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids further comprises:

- introducing a gas into the melt of the lead alloy coating while immersing the strip of interconnected battery grids in the melt of the lead alloy coating.

25. The method of claim 22 wherein the grid material comprises a lead-calcium alloy and the coating comprises a lead-tin alloy.

26. The method of claim 25 wherein the lead-tin alloy comprises about 90 wt. % to about 99 wt. % lead and about 1 wt. % to about 10 wt. % tin.

27. The method of claim 25 wherein the lead-tin alloy further includes antimony.

28. The method of claim 27 wherein the lead-tin alloy comprises about 80 wt. % to about 98 wt. % lead, about 1 wt. % to about 10 wt. % tin, and about 1 wt. % to about 10 wt. % antimony.

29. The method of claim 22 further comprising:
stamping at least a portion of the grid wire elements at a position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element before applying the lead alloy coating to the interconnected battery grids such that a first transverse cross-section taken at the position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element differs from a second transverse cross-section taken at one of the opposed ends of the grid wire element.

30. The method of claim 22 further comprising:
quenching the interconnected battery grids in a fluid bath after applying the lead alloy coating to the interconnected battery grids and before applying battery paste to the interconnected battery grids.

31. The method of claim 22 further comprising:
age hardening the interconnected battery grids at an elevated temperature after quenching the interconnected battery grids and before applying battery paste to the interconnected battery grids.

32. A method of making a plurality of battery grids, the method comprising:
forming a strip of interconnected battery grids from a lead alloy grid material, each interconnected battery grid including a grid network bordered by at least one frame element, one of the frame elements having a current collector lug, the grid network comprising a plurality of spaced apart grid wire elements, each

grid wire element having opposed ends, each opposed end being joined to one of a plurality of nodes to define a plurality of open spaces in the grid network;

applying a lead alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids;
and

cutting the strip to form a plurality of battery grids.

33. The method of claim 32 further comprising:

deforming at least a portion of the grid wire elements at a position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element before applying the lead alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids such that a first transverse cross-section taken at the position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element differs from a second transverse cross-section taken at one of the opposed ends of the grid wire element.

34. The method of claim 33 wherein the step of deforming at least a portion of the grid wire elements comprises:

stamping the grid wire element at the position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element.

35. The method of claim 32 wherein the step of forming a strip of interconnected battery grids from a grid material comprises:

feeding a continuous strip of the grid material along a linear path aligned with the longitudinal direction of the strip; and

punching grid material out of the strip to form the strip of interconnected battery grids.

36. The method of claim 32 wherein:

the continuous strip of the grid material is formed by a continuously casting a melt of the lead alloy grid material.

37. The method of claim 32 wherein the step of applying a lead alloy

coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids comprises:

immersing the strip of interconnected battery grids in a melt of the lead alloy coating.

38. The method of claim 37 wherein the step of applying a lead alloy coating to the strip of interconnected battery grids further comprises:

introducing a gas into the melt of the lead alloy coating while immersing the strip of interconnected battery grids in the melt of the lead alloy coating.

39. A grid for a battery comprising:

a grid network bordered by at least one frame element, one of the frame elements having a current collector lug,

the grid network comprising a plurality of spaced apart grid wire elements, each grid wire element having opposed ends, each opposed end being joined to one of a plurality of nodes to define a plurality of open spaces,

the grid network being coated on substantially all surfaces with a lead alloy coating;

at least a portion of the grid wire elements having a first transverse cross-section taken at a position intermediate the opposed ends of the grid wire element that differs from a second transverse cross-section taken at one of the opposed ends of the grid wire element.

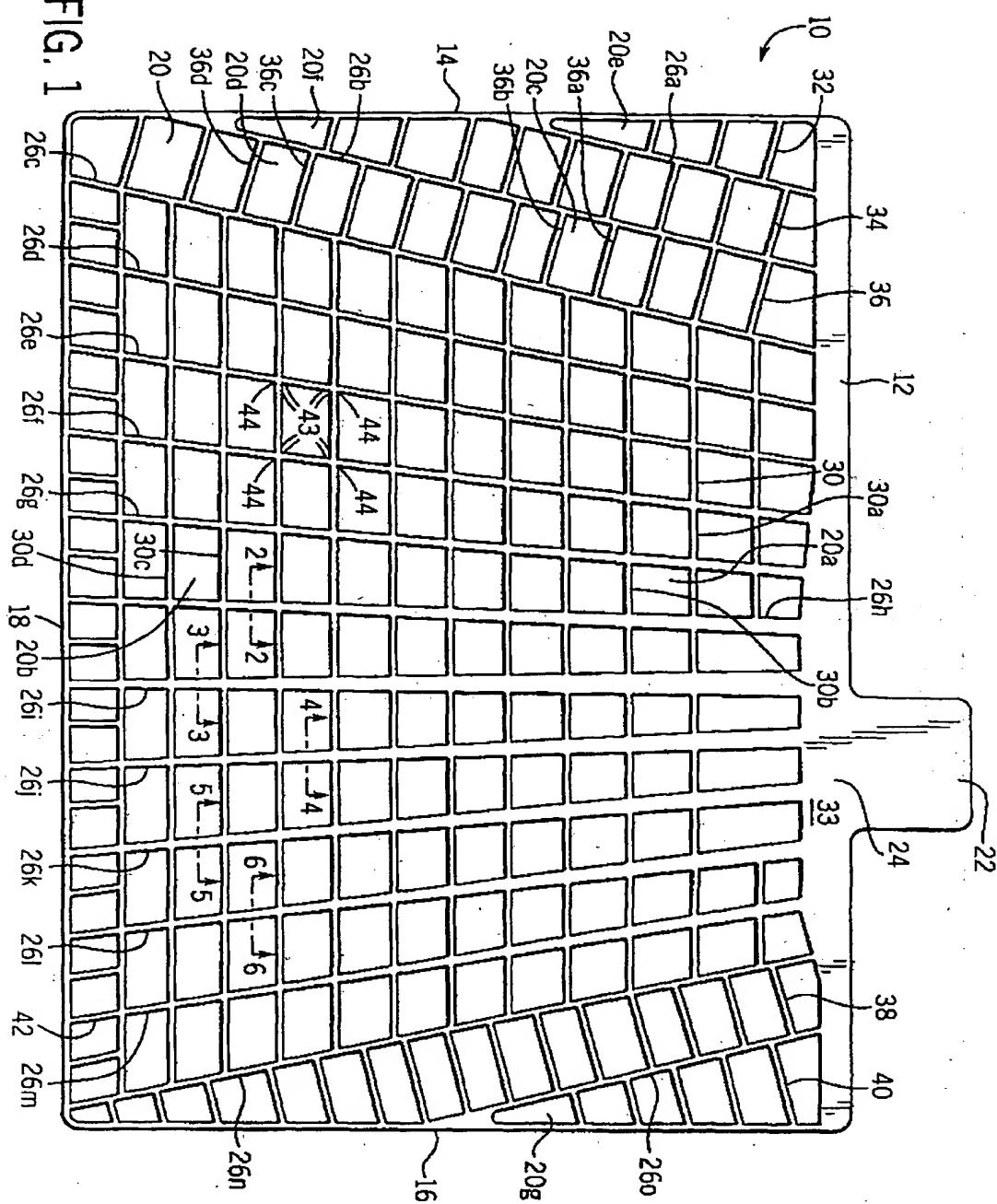
40. The grid of claim 39 wherein:

the second transverse cross-section is substantially rectangular.

41. The grid of claim 39 wherein:

the first transverse cross-section substantially has a shape selected from group consisting of diamond, oval, rhomboid, hexagon, and octagon.

42. The grid of claim 39 wherein the lead alloy coating is porous.



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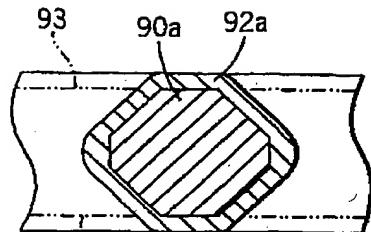


FIG. 2

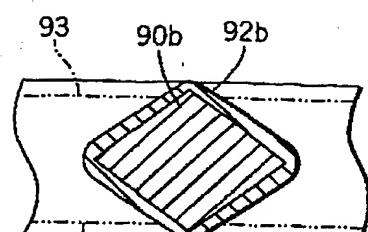


FIG. 3

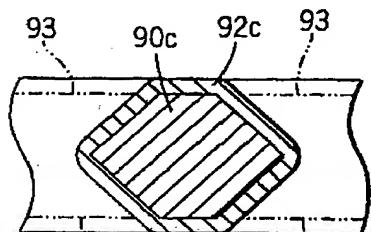


FIG. 4

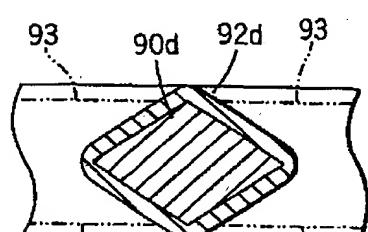


FIG. 5

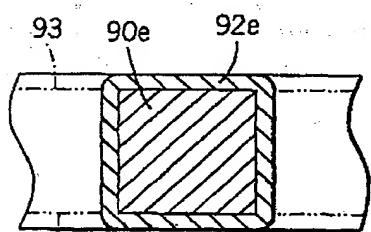


FIG. 6A

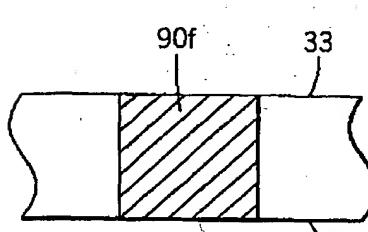
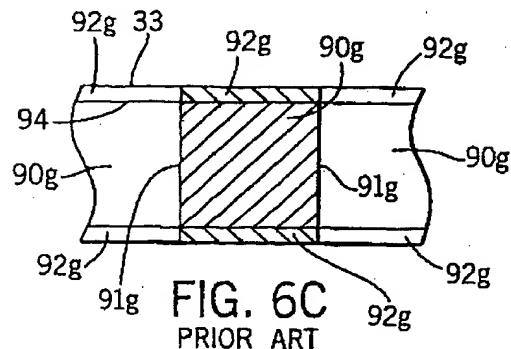
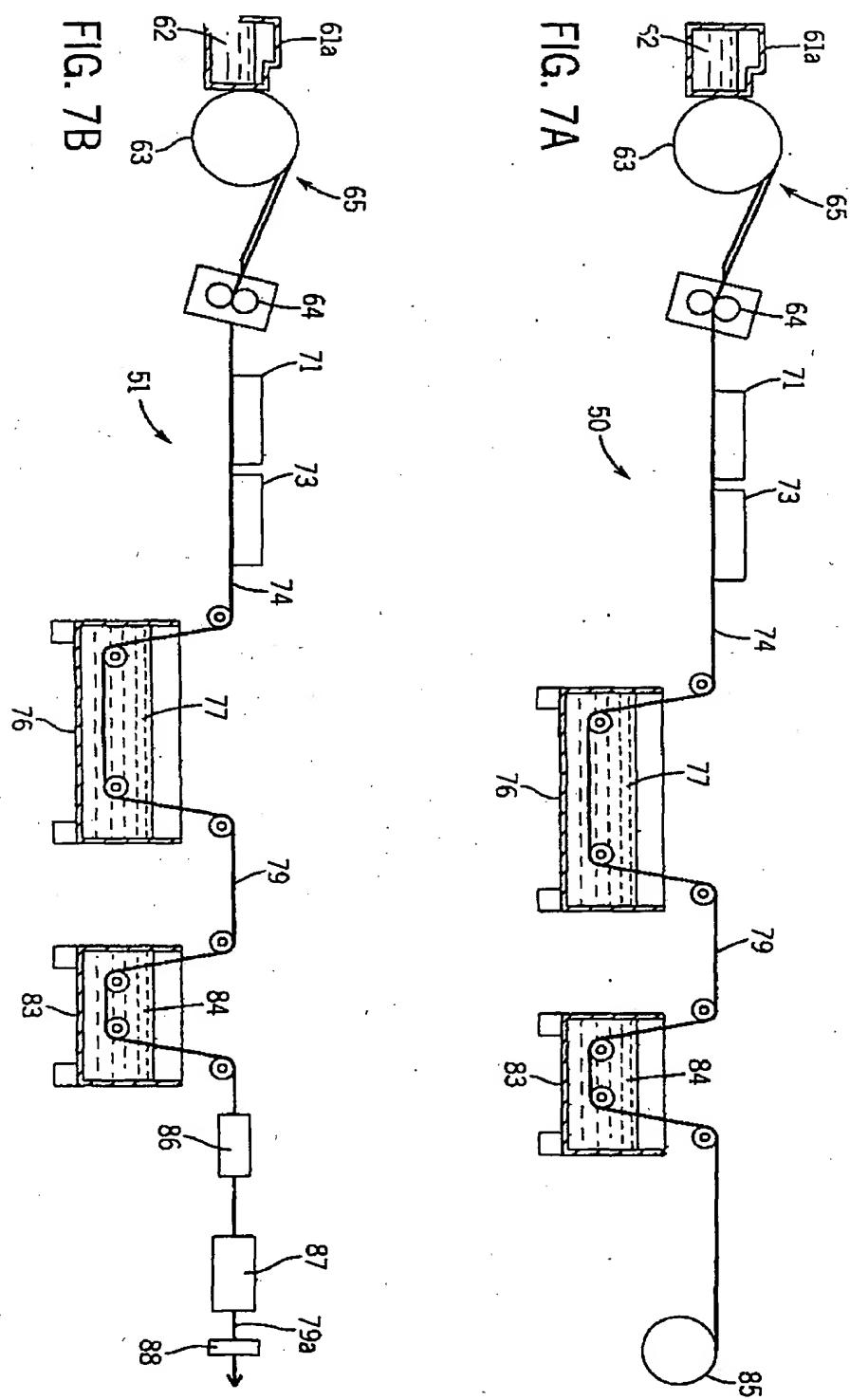
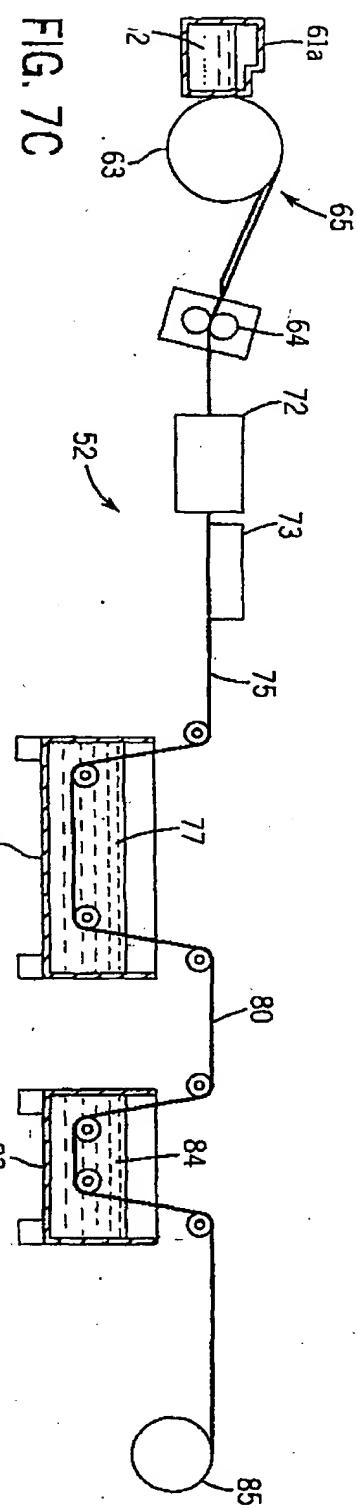
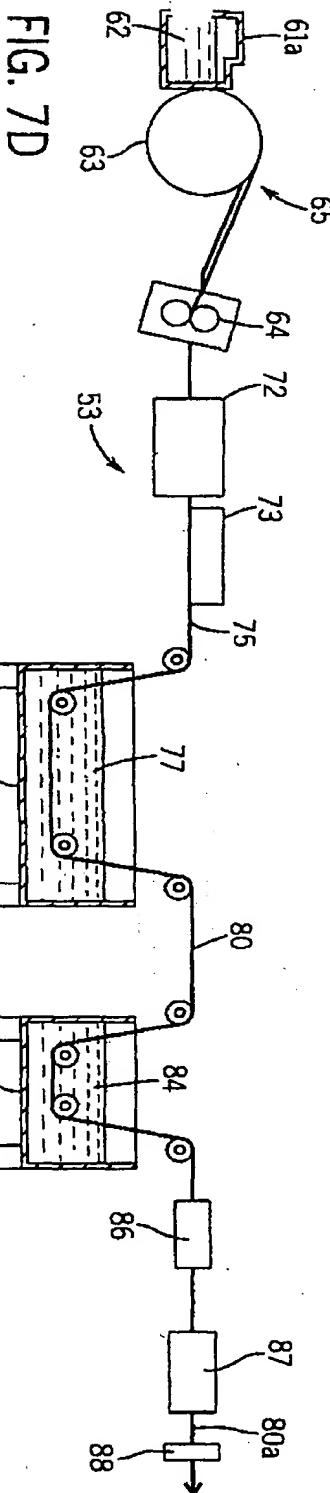


FIG. 6B







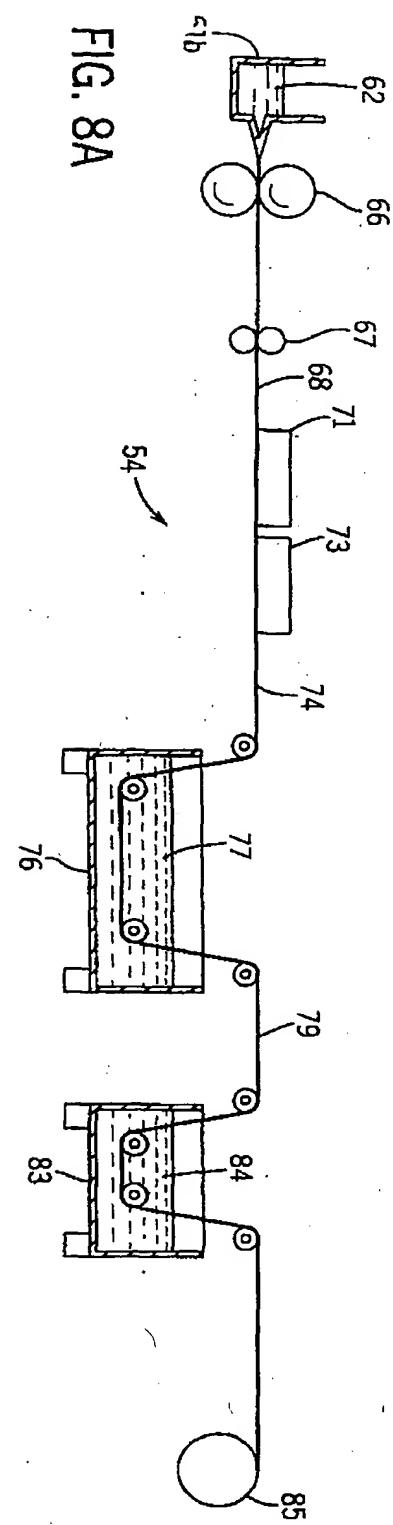
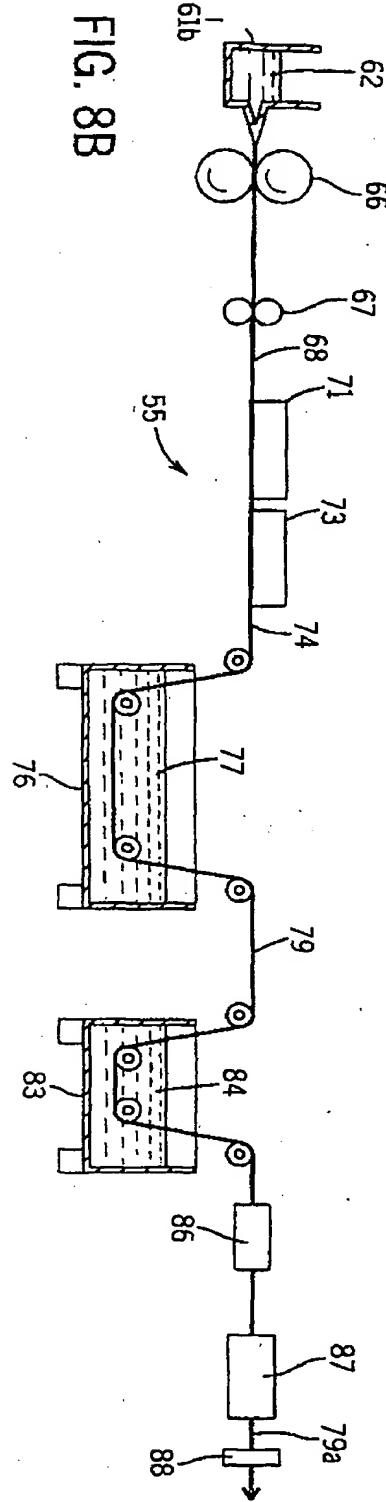


FIG. 8D

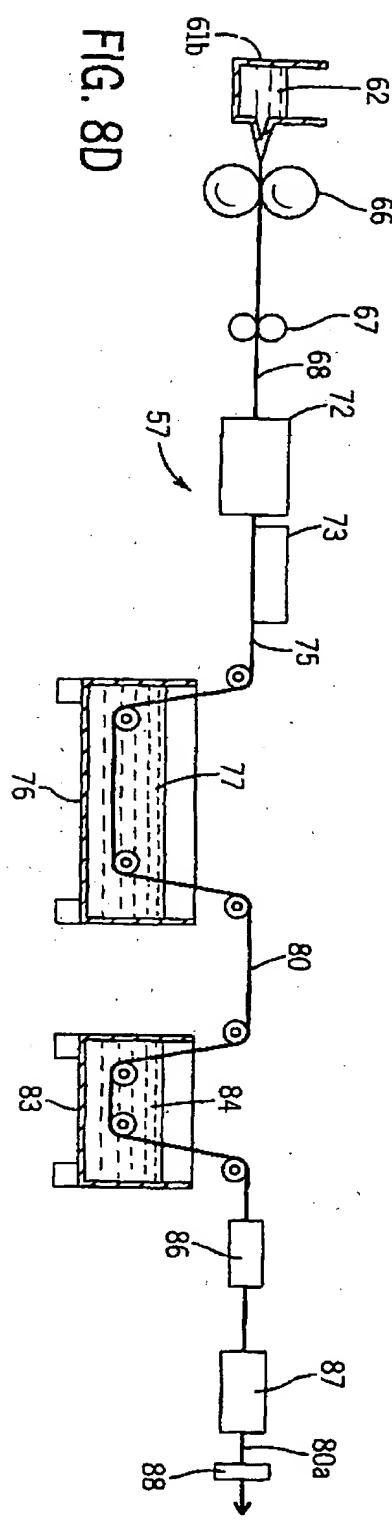


FIG. 8C

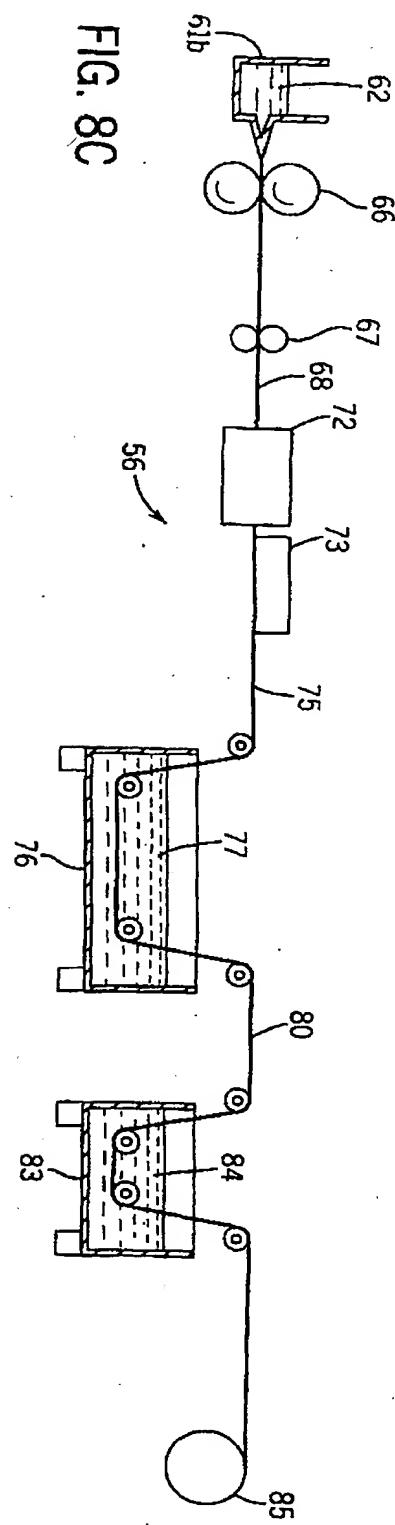


FIG. 9B

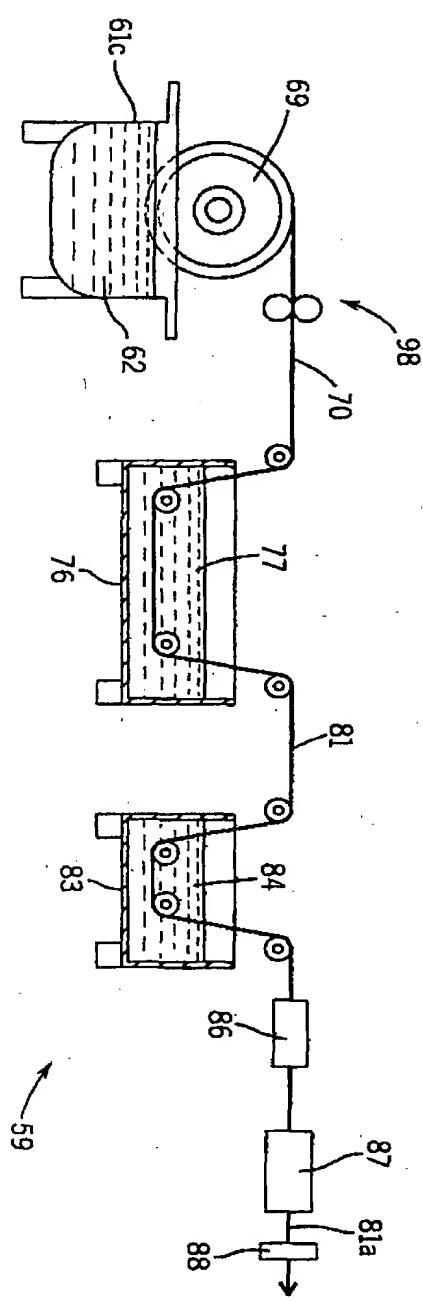


FIG. 9A

